THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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Except for the correction of some typographical errors, this "digitally remastered" version is identical to the original seminar paper. (It does incorporate small handwritten changes made to the typed paper before it was turned in.) The paper was written for Professor Stanley Hoffman, who was visiting Berkeley during the Spring 1966 semester. Professor Hoffman was then, and remains today, a member of the Department of Government at Harvard University.

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For the analyst of international politics, the Cuban missile crisis was a marvelously useful event. Though in other respects no doubt he feels differently, from his professional point of view he may wish that we might have several more crises like it.

Two aspects of the crisis are of basic concern to the student of international politics. The first is the playing out of the crisis itself; by reconstructing the events he can analyze the calculations made by the participants, their successful and unsuccessful communications, the strategy and tactics employed, and the specific factors facilitating the ultimate settlement. Much of this I have examined in fair detail previously.[1] The second is the setting of the crisis in the international system and its subsequent impact on relationships within that system. It is this aspect that I want to examine at the present time.

Thus in no sense will I here attempt to "tell the story" of the Cuban crisis. This has been done, perhaps not entirely adequately, elsewhere.[2] Rather in the first part of the paper I will consider some characteristics of this crisis, the functions and consequences of crises generally, crisis decision making and the extent to which the Cuban crisis may be regarded as typical in this respect, and the risk of war involved in the Cuban episode. In the second part of the paper, I will consider primarily the impact of the crisis on Soviet-American relations, both military and political, and secondarily the impact of the crisis on Soviet-Chinese relations and European-American relations. Certain points connected with the playing out of the crisis are discussed in the appendices. A fairly thorough bibliography covering all aspects of the crisis is attached at the end of the paper.

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If the present international system is characterized by day-to-day polycentrism, the Cuban missile crisis shows that its latent bipolarity can come to the surface under certain circumstances. Indeed, as the “Cuban crisis,” the event is badly misnamed. During the week of the crisis the Cuban government was in no way actively involved, as Premier Castro pointed out with considerable indignation afterwards. Rather the crisis was a direct confrontation between the two superpowers, certainly the most intense and dramatic, perhaps the most dangerous and significant ever. President Kennedy, in his speech of October 22, challenged the Soviet Union and Premier Khrushchev directly and ignored Cuba and Premier Castro entirely. And after initial hesitation, the Soviet Union in turn bargained and settled directly with the United States. The Soviet Union agreed to withdraw the missiles, and even proposed United Nations inspection of the dismantled sites, without consulting the Cuban government. It was left to Secretary-Genenal U Thant to remind the Soviet Union (and

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[1] "The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Political Analysis," May, 1964.

[2] E. W. Kenworthy and others, Review of the Cuban Crisis, *New York Times*, November 3, 1962; James Daniel and John G. Hubbell, *Strike in the West: The Complete story of the Cuban Crisis* (New York, 1963); Henry M. Pachter, *Collision Course: The Cuban Missile Crisis and Coexistence* (New York, 1963 , Part I; Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1966).

the United States) that Cuba was a sovereign state, and that Cuba's consent would have to be obtained to carry out the proposed inspection. (Despite the persuasive efforts of U Thant and Mr. Mikoyan, that consent was never obtained and the inspection was never carried out.) Indeed, among the principal actors, only U Thant treated Castro as a participant in the events and accorded him a measure of deference.

Moreover, there is no evidence whatsoever that the Soviet Union consulted with any of its other allies in deciding first to put the missiles into Cuba and second how to respond to the American challenge.[3] And of course it is well known that the United States did not consult with its allies (European or Latin American) but only informed them of its plans shortly before the President's speech.[4] In short, the "Cuban crisis" was an almost pure bipolar confrontation.

The present international system is in many ways a universal veto system, each participant generally being able to block the objectives of others. No nation can or will change the international status quo by force. In such a system international crisis and confrontation (threatened use of force, which no one can quite believe or disbelieve, and tests of will or patience) may perform functions similar to war and the actual use of (international) violence in previous systems — that is, to bring about change in an environment that does not adequately provide for or facilitate peaceful, political change. War is "unthinkable" but confrontation is the continuation of diplomacy by other means.

Yet while crises may have consequences for the international system (change), these consequences may be either direct and anticipated or indirect and largely unanticipated. And the direct consequences are likely to be less important because typically the direct consequence of a crisis is to maintain the status quo. Confrontation over Berlin has not changed the formal status of Berlin. And in the present case the United States maintained the status quo by keeping Soviet strategic missiles out of Cuba, but it could not, and did not even try to, overthrow the status quo by forcing a general Soviet disengagement from Cuba or by deposing the Castro regime.

The indirect and largely unanticipated (or at least unpredictable) consequences of a crisis, however, may modify the structure of the international system and may thus be of greater significance. The importance of this point may be illustrated by comparing the immediate or "nominal" outcome of the Cuban crisis with its total (nominal plus "spillover") outcome. The nominal outcome of the crisis was that the Soviet Union agreed not to install strategic weapons in Cuba and the United States agreed not to invade Cuba. To repeat, the nominal outcome was to maintain the status quo. Yet this could have been achieved simply by a formal or tacit agreement between the two nations, without a showdown. Yet I think just to suggest this alternative means of reaching the same nominal outcome indicates how different the implications and consequences of such an agreement would have been from those of the crisis as actually played out. With this comparison it is easy to see that the actual crisis had consequences far beyond its nominal outcome. What is hard to do is to trace out and delimit these consequences.

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[3] And there is evidence from the Chinese that they did not. Chinese Statement of September 1, 1963. See William E. Griffith, *The Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), pp. 383-384.

[4] When informed by Dean Acheson" President de Gaulle is reported to have replied, "I am in favor of independent decisions." Abel, *op. cit.*, p.112.

If the most significant consequences are the relatively unanticipated and unpredictable ones, this suggests limits to the use of crisis as a rational instrument of policy. It is somewhat like setting dynamite to a logjam. One knows the pieces will be differently arranged afterwards but one cannot predict exactly how. In addition, and especially in the case of Soviet-American confrontations, each crisis increases the supreme risk of general war.

This last consideration suggests several questions concerning crises and rational decision-making. It is commonly asserted that crisis will make irrational, emotional, and impetuous decision-making more likely. Thus crises are doubly dangerous. The Cuban crisis provides at least a counter-example. During the crisis the actors seemed to behave if anything more "rationally" than normally. This is not, in itself, an argument. in favor of crises, first because in any crisis, the increase in inherent risk is likely to outweigh the increase, if any, in "rationality," and second because the Cuban crisis is not necessarily typical of the range of possible crises.

In the first place, the American government had a full five days to decide upon and design its response to the Soviet provocation, far more than the proverbial fifteen-minute nuclear-age warning time, and more than may be available under other likely circumstances. President Kennedy ad several of his associates have suggested that they might well have chosen less wisely and less moderately if less time had been available to them.[5] In the second place, part of the wisdom of the American response was to give the Soviet leaders sufficient time to think carefully about the relative advantages and disadvantages of their various options. Without this pause, they also might well have chosen differently. Finally the moves on each side were under the unilateral control of each great power. Walter Lippmann has suggested that crisis management is best facilitated when there is "only one driver at the wheel" (on either side).[6] No doubt this is true, but it will not necessarily always be the fact, and any strategic analyst can tell you that N-person games are *much* more complicated than two-person games.

Two adverse implications should also be noted. The first is the problem of fatigue. Reports indicate that by the end of the crisis week the members of the Executive Committee were irritable and mentally and physically exhausted. Premier Khrushchev's letter of October 26 apparently showed signs of somewhat similar fatigue. If the crisis had continued, the quality of decision-making would likely have deteriorated. Secondly, arises pose problems of allocating decision-making resources. Officials can devote their full time and energy to crisis management (especially burdensome if secrecy must be maintained) but only at the cost of letting other things slide. For example, Richard Neustadt has suggested that the demands of the Cuban crisis tightened down the

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[5] President Kennedy, TV interview, Washington, D.C., December 18,.1962. Theodore C. Sorenson, *Decision-Making in the White House* (New York, 1963), p. 30. The basic choice was between some kind of air strike and some kind of blockade. In the earlier days of deliberation the weight of opinion favored the former course. The consideration that the two alternatives were not mutually exclusive, provided that a blockade was the initial response, was not immediately apparent to the participants. Furthermore, when additional people were inforned and their opinions solicited, the first response of most, including Senator Fulbright, was to recommend an air strike. Sorenson, "Kennedy: Part Three," *Look*, Vol. 29, No. 18 (September 7, 1966), p. 61 and "Part Four," No. 19, September 21, 1966), p. 52; Abel, *op. cit*., pp. 81, 89, 93, 119.

[6] "Cuba and the Nuclear Risk," *Atlantic*, Vol. 211, No.2 (February, 1963), p. 58.

time available for and narrowed the perspective of the immediately subsequent Skybolt decision (which in turn had enormously significant unanticipated consequences).[7]

The above suggests that, under certain conditions it may be true that there is nothing like the prospect of nuclear war to make people think clearly. But we can suspect that this is time only up to a point. The hypothesis that there is a curvilinear relationship between threat of disaster and efficient decision-making would apparently be supported by social-psychological theory.[8]

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How great, in fact, was the risk of general war in the Cuban crisis? On this point, there seem to be two schools of thought. Most of the participants in the crisis and many journalists and other commentators have emphasized the severity of the risk and "how close we were to war." President Kennedy is reported to have declared on October 27 that "now it can go either way" and in his letter to Premier Khrushchev the following day he observed that "developments were approaching the point where events could have become unmanageable."[9] Premier Khrushchev in his report to the Supreme Soviet on December 12, 1962, characterized the crisis as "fraught with the danger of universal thermonuclear war."[10] Many journalists and other commentators, including people who had previously postulated a more or less automatically stable balance of terror, have described the super-powers as on the brink of general war. On the other hand, several professional strategic analysts, who generally postulate rather stringent requirements for successful deterrence, saw relatively less risk of this particu1ar crisis exploding.[11]

Why this divergence in assessing the risk? A number of partial explanations can be suggested. First of all, both during and after the crisis, the participants had various political reasons for emphasizing the risk of war in their statements and communications. The United States emphasized the risk ot war to put pressure on the Soviet Union to remove its bases quickly. Premier Khrushchev in turn *at first* (see Appendix II) emphasized the risk of war to deter the United States from intercepting Soviet ships or launching military operations against Cuba. After Khrushchev had proposed an acceptable solution, Kennedy may have sought to reassure him that he had made the right decision by emphasizing the danger that had been avoided. And when Khrushchev was later subjected to criticism from the Chinese, and perhaps members of the Soviet hierarchy, for "capitulationism," he took up this cue. The supposedly imminent risk of thermonuclear war

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[7] Testimony before the Jackson Subcommittee, *Administration of National Security*, March, 1963, Part I, p. 97. See also Sorenson, *Decision-Making in the White House*, p. 18. Neustad was commissioned by President Kennedy to study this affair.

[8] Dean G. Pruitt, "Definition of the Situation as a Determinant of International Action," in Herbert C. Kelman, *International Behavior: A Social-Psychological Analysis*, (New York, 1965, pp. 395ff.

[9] Pachter, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 247.

[11] Herman Kahn, who has devised the metaphor of the forty-four rung escalation ladder, put the Cuban crisis on Rung Nine, making it a "traditional crisis" below the "nuclear war is unthinkable" threshold. *On Esca1ation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (New York, 1965), pp. 74-82. See also Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter, "Controlling the Risks in Cuba," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 17, April 1965, especially pp. 15-16.

provided a rationale for his defeat. Thus for various reasons the participants consciously exaggerated the risk of war. But beyond this, the risk may well have been exaggerated unconsciously in their own minds, just because they were the participants upon whom personal responsibility for the fate of the world rested. If such a psychological tendency exists in statesmen, this would be healthy. Finally, the analysts are analyzing the crisis retrospectively, and there is probably a tendency, when one reconstructs past events, to conclude that it was "inevitable" that things came out as they did. The subsequent satisfactory course of events did not appear "inevitable" to the decision-makers at the time.

It seems to me, retrospectively, that the risk of war in the Cuban crisis was less, for example, than in any confrontation over Berlin. I am here referring to the risk of nuclear exchanges; further and more intense conventional action was clearly imminent. So far as nuclear war was concerned, probably the greatest risk was that American actions in the Caribbean would trigger Soviet countermoves in Berlin, leading to renewed confrontation there.

I think we may distinguish between two mechanisms of escalation. In the basic escalation process, each side determines to hold out just a while longer, or to move up one rung higher, to bear greater costs and run greater risks, in the hope that after the next increment of violence and risk the other side will decide to call it quits and back down. The other side, of course, is thinking along similar lines. Furthermore as each side sinks more and more resources and prestige into the conflict, the value of the stake is inflated far beyond its original value, reinforcing the determination of each side to stick it out. In certain respects this process resembles the notorious game of "chicken." And to a certain extent this symmetric logic is inherent in all conflict situations, but the strength of the logical compulsion depends largely on the strength of the original commitments and on the extent to which the confrontation is regarded by all concerned as a test case. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were less strongly committed on Cuba than on Berlin. This was especially true because of the clearly limited nature of the American demand; had the United States demanded a full Soviet retreat from Cuba, the Soviet commitment would have been considerably stronger and the risk of escalation considerably greater. Secondly, Berlin, not Cuba, is regarded on all sides as the critical conflict.

A second but subsidiary incentive for escalation results when the relative military advantages for each side vary as the crisis moves up the rungs of the "escalation ladder." Thus one side may be relatively disadvantaged at the lower levels and will have a unilateral incentive to raise the level of violence, which the other side must then match. In the same way the second side may then have a unilateral incentive to move up still higher. This mechanism of escalation, due to asymmetries in the overall military balance, did not apply in the Cuban case. In a Caribbean crisis, unlike a Central European crisis, the Soviet Union is at a severe disadvantage at every possible level of escalation (even the very highest). Partly for this reason, it was willing to make a (reasonable) settlement without escalation.

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The nominal outcome of the Cuban crisis, as we have seen, was to preserve the status quo. The more significant consequences of the crisis, those producing changes in the structure of the international system, were the unanticipated, "incidental," or "spillover" effects — the changes in the perceptions and expectations of the international actors (statesmen) resulting from the experience

of the crisis and translating themselves into changed international behavior and relationships. The incidental character of these consequences may perhaps be overemphasized. It has been suggested, for example, that Premier Khrushchev planned his adventure (in part) as an experimental probing operation. On the other side, it may be that the United states in some sense welcomed the confrontation as an opportunity to impress upon the Soviet Union the resolve of the United States to defend its vital interests, calculating that only thus would it be possible to reach any international settlements. However, it seems implausible to suppose that a conscious purpose of either side was, for example, to facilitate the achievement of a nuclear test ban treaty. It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that the fundamental purpose of the Soviet Union was to try to put missiles into Cuba and of the United States was to try to get them out.

It is easy to believe that the crisis had consequences of this unanticipated sort. The international system looks somewhat different following the crisis. What is hard — even impossible — is precisely to delimit and describe these consequence and to say that this particular change was due to the crisis and this other change was due to some other factor. Because historical events are unique, no such causal statements can be entirely valid and unambiguous.

With this limitation in mind, we can distinguish between three sets of international relationships which were likely to be affected by the crisis: (*a*) Soviet-American relations, (*b*) Sino-Soviet relations, and (*c*) European-American relations. Clearly the crisis had an impact on other relationships, especially Soviet-Cuban relations,[12] but these three account for the most important characteristics of the international system. In the remainder of the paper I will focus primarily on Soviet-American relations, because presumably these are most important and were most directly affected by the crisis. Moreover, in considerable measure, the others are determined by Soviet-American relations.

For purposes of analysis, one other set of categories will be introduced — alternative versions of the crisis, one actual and two hypothetical: alternative A, Soviet challenge and American response, the actual version; alternative B, Soviet challenge and no (effective) American response; and alternative C, no challenge and no response. Another hypothetical alternative — much more severe escalation — will not be considered. These hypothetical alternatives, of course, are vague and encompass several rather different possibilities. Nevertheless, they seem to me useful. When we consider how things would have been different in the absence of the crisis, it is especially important to distinguish between alternatives Band C.

In examining the impact of the Cuban crisis on Soviet-American relations, the first question to be asked is to what extent and in what ways did the establishment of Soviet strategic bases in Cuba alter the world distribution of power and threaten the position of the United states. In other words, what would have been the consequences of alternative B?

Some people have argued that, while the American operation was tactically competent and in fact successful, the risk involved was not justified by the threat, because the installation of the

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[12] Soviet-Cuban interests diverge at many points, probably much more significantly than European-American interests. Premier Castro, no doubt unintentionally, bluntly reminded the Soviet Union of this divergence when he told a reporter, "For us Cubans, it didn't make really so much difference whether we died by conventional bombing or a hydrogen bomb." Jean Daniel, "Unofficial Envoy," *New Republic*, Vol. 149, No. 24 (December 14,: 1963).

missiles would have made no significant difference in any case.[13] This conclusion, I take it, is just wrong. A less extreme view is that, while stationing of the missiles would have had a psychological impact, the missiles were of no significance from an objective military point of view. In response to this, several points should be made.

First, to say that the impact of the missiles would have been only psychological is not to say that that impact would have been exactly unimportant, especially in a political system in which deterrence, resolve, reputation, and so forth, rather than military capabilities as such or the actual resort to arms, are so important.

Second, I believe that the missiles would have made a significant military difference, at least in the short run. The first order of strategic wisdom in the nuclear age is to recognize that technology has greatly altered the meaning of geography, distance, and time. By this standard "missiles in Cuba are just the same as missiles in the Soviet Union" (apart from the fact that they were *in addition* to missiles in the Soviet Union). But the second order of strategic wisdom is to take account of such complexities as vulnerability, accuracy, command and control, and so forth.[14] By this standard easy dismissal of the missiles' military significance is unwise. (What the third order of strategic wisdom is, no one is quite sure of as yet.)

Finally, while it may be true that Nikita Khrushchev, was an "adventurist" and a "capitulationist" and a "harebrained schemer," as his comrades now say, I think we should at least give him credit for expecting to derive some considerable Soviet advantage from his gamble.

Another problem is the comparison between Soviet missiles in Cuba and American missiles in Turkey, a comparison which, to the embarrassment of the American government, has frequently been drawn.[15] However, several fairly important distinctions can be made between the two situations. First is the relatively trivial matter of numbers. There were fifteen missiles in Turkey. Forty-two missiles were removed from Cuba. Additional missiles were in transit. A total of about seventy-five medium and intermediate range missiles was immediately planned[16] (and this number could later have been increased). This is equal to the total estimated number of operational intercontinental missiles (capable of reaching the United states) then available to the Soviet Union.

A more important difference than the quantity (or quality) of the missiles was the manner in which they were introduced into Cuba and Turkey. The missiles were put into Cuba secretly, hurriedly, and

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[13] See, for example, I. F. Stone's review of Elie Abel's book, *The Missile Crisis*, in the *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 6, No.6 (April 14, 1966), pp. 12-16.

[14] See Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter, *loc. cit.*, especially pp. 10-13.

[15] By 1961 the United States regarded the Turkish missiles as without military value. President Kennedy had sought their removal, but the Turkish government objected and he let the matter drop for the while. Max Frankel, *New York Times*, October 28, 1962, p. 31. (Another report is that in August 1962 President Kennedy had actually given final orders for their removal and was surprised and dismayed to discover during the crisis that they were still in place. Abel, *op. cit.*, p. 191. However, this seems hard to believe.) They were finally removed in 1963.

[16] Wohlstetter, *loc. cit.*, p 11.

under false pretenses.[17] The missiles were put into Turkey openly and were not operational until a year or more after the agreement was announced. This difference has both military and psychological implications and also suggests a difference in purpose.

Finally, the Soviets (among others) apparently underestimated the emotional significance of Cuba for the American people and, to some extent, for American decision-makers. Thus placing "offensive" weapons in Cuba was especially provocative. Turkey on the other hand is traditionally hostile to the Soviet Union. The parallel would be closer in this respect if the United States had attempted to place missiles in Finland, traditionally deferential to the Soviet Union.

In evaluating the threat and meaning of the Soviet adventure, two variables should not be ignored. The first is the number of missiles that would have gone in. This point has already been touched on. The second, perhaps more important and less obvious, is who would have controlled the missiles. Underlying any proposed answer to this question must be some theory as to Soviet purpose. On this there are two divergent views. One is that the installation of the missiles was basically a Cuban idea, to which the Soviets, perhaps reluctantly, agreed. The other is that it was basically a Soviet idea, to which the Cubans, perhaps reluctantly, agreed. Each answer suggests a different purpose, which in turn has different implications for the matter of numbers and control.

In the first case, the missiles were put into Cuba primarily to defend Cuba by deterring an American attack.[18] In this case a rather small number of missiles should have sufficed, and logically the Soviets should have put control of the missiles into Cuban hands or have appeared to do so.[19]

In the second case, the missiles were sent into Cuba to right the Soviet-American strategic imbalance, and perhaps, in preparation for a confrontation over Berlin, to deter the United states from making nuclear threats against the Soviet Union. In this case, a larger number of missiles under evident Soviet control was probably desirable.[20]

Neither explanation alone seems entirely plausible and it is quite possible different incentives converged. It should also be noted that Soviet doctrines postulate the relationship between socialism and imperialism (in practice the Soviet Union and the United States), measured to a large extent in

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[17] See the Soviet communique of September 11, Pachter , *op. cit.*, p.177. Apparently President Kennedy also received private assurances from Soviet emissaries that no missiles capable of reaching the United States were being sent to Cuba. Sorenson, "Kennedy, Part Three," *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[18] This is roughly the private Cuban explanation. Daniel, "Unofficial Envoy," *loc. cit.* See also Theodore Draper, "Castro and Communism," *The Reporter*, Vol. 28, No.2 (January 17,1963). It is also the official subsequent Soviet explanation. See Premier Khrushchev's speech before the Supreme Soviet, December 12, 1962, Pachter, *op. cit.*, p. 244ff, and also his letters to President Kennedy during the latter part of the crisis.

[19] In his December 12 speech, Premier Khrushchev said the weapons were to be in the hands of the Soviet military. *Ibid.*, p. 244. Evidently, they were under exclusive, even jealous, Soviet control up through the time of their removal.

[20] The American judgment that Khrushchev would never put strategic missiles in Cuba, because he had never before put strategic missiles on the territory of other Communist states, overlooked the fact Cuba presented Khrushchev with the first opportunity he had to station medium and intermediate range missiles (which he had in considerable quantity) where they could reach the United States.

terms of the nuclear balance, as the critical determining factor of the course of world events today (this is a point of doctrinal difference with the Chinese). If they take this doctrine seriously, the Soviets themselves might analyze their policy in rather different terms from those presented here.

Let us now turn from hypothetical to actual outcomes. Within a year of the Cuban missile crisis, the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to establish a "hot line" communications link, to exchange certain captured spies, to ban (without international controls) weapons in outer space, and most dramatically to ban (again without international controls) all but underground nuclear tests (the Soviet Union in effect now agreeing to a Western proposal it had previously rejected). Soon after the accession of President Johnson, the two nations tacitly agreed to cut back nuclear production and to reduce their defense budgets slightly. These events were the more tangible indications of the so-called "detente" of 1963-1964. This succession of agreements was quite dramatic and rather closely followed the resolution of, the Cuban crisis. To what extent was it due to the crisis?

As previously mentioned this sort of questioned cannot be unambiguously answered, but we can say certain things. In the first place, it seems quite clear that hypothetical version B of the crisis would not have produced, or even permitted, a test ban agreement or a general detente. The Soviet Union would more likely have exploited its daring and successful initiative not to make concessions in test ban negotiations but rather to press very hard for negotiations to "normalize" the Berlin situation. Even if the Soviet Union still had been interested in a test ban, it is unlikely that the Kennedy Administration still would have been, or still could have afforded to be, interested. Under the presumed circumstances, the political climate in the Unites States would have been quite unpleasant and hardly conducive to new approaches to the Communist world.

Thus it seems safe to conclude that alternative A, more than B, facilitated the detente. But how would alternatives A and C compare in this respect. While the question of causal relations between unique events can never be finally answered, we can make tentative choices among explanations on the basis of theory. On what theoretical bases can we explain the development of the Soviet-American detente in 1963.

One explanation of the events of June-November 1963 has been provided by Amitai Etzioni.[21] He views these events as a test and confirmation of a moderate version of that psychological explanation of international conflict providing the theoretical basis for the policy recommendation of "unilateral initiatives" or "graduated reduction of international tensions."[22] Etzioni views President Kennedy's speech of June 10 at American University as the first of a series of American tension-reducing initiatives which the Soviets reciprocated. Despite the subsequent cutbacks in nuclear production, he views this process as ending in November.

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[21] "The Kennedy Experiment," unpublished monograph.

[22] See Etzioni, *The Hard Way to Peace* (Hew York, 1962). For a "stronger" version of the theory, see Charles Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Urbana, 1962). In the "strong" version, war can be fully explained at the psychological level of analysis. In the "moderate" version, psychological factors provide one of several important dimensions for explaining international conflict. If the theory is made sufficiently moderate, no one can disagree with it. Also if the theory is made more moderate, the policy recommendation becomes increasingly questionable or conditional (or should be made conditional). Was Gernan-Western tension in the 1930's the result of a "mirror-image" phenomenon? Would Westerners have been less hostile to Hitler if they had "understood" him better?

I think we can say that these events mean that, under certain conditions, the "GRIT" theory is not disproved, but this is rather faint praise. GRIT may have some use from the point of view of foreign policy analysis. That is to say, if the United States (or, presumably, the Soviet Union) makes some conciliatory gesture, the other side will respond, and a measure of "de-escalation" will proceed, at least under certain conditions. But from the point of view of international relations analysis, the important question remains unanswered (and unasked). Why did the process of reciprocation get under way in the first place? If the American University speech was critical, why was it delivered? And why in fact did Premier Khrushchev reciprocate? President Kennedy made somewhat similar overtures at the beginning of his administration and Khrushchev had "reciprocated" first in Laos and then in Berlin. What explains the difference? I cannot help but believe that the Cuban crisis had something to do with it.

In considering this problem, I think we do well to turn from Etzioni to that peacenik in wolf's clothing, Herman Kahn, and consider his notion (I won't say theory) of "crash disarmament."[23] He argues that after a severe crisis and severe escalation the world would not simply return to its pre-crisis state and that people (decision-makers and others) would no longer be satisfied with assurances about the stability of deterrence. For some period the dominant sentiment in the minds of the decision-makers would be "we can't permit this to happen again," and under these conditions they would agree to things that they would not agree to under other normal circumstances. This changed attitude would be an important spillover effect of the crisis, and this idea strikes me as suggestive in the case of the post-Cuban world. Admittedly, the post-Cuban "crash disarmament" was very modest indeed, but then, by the standards of Kahn's scenarios, the Cuban crisis was a very modest crisis. If this line of plausible reasoning is correct, the detente was not originally due to a peaceful gesture that the United States made toward the Soviet Union but was due to the fact that a few months earlier American policy-makers scared the Soviets badly — and scared themselves in the process. Like GRIT, this is in part a psychological explanation, but it has different implications and it is not proposed as a complete explanation. Other more specific factors have to be considered.

Thus far, in attempting to account for the detente following the Cuban crisis, we having been looking at general factors bearing symmetrically on the United States and the Soviet Union. Yet in part the detente may have resulted from changed behavior on the part pf one great power alone. For example, Etzioni suggests, but does not give great weight to, the notion that the psychological effect of the dramatic American success of October 1962, coming after a long series of cold-war reverses and deadlocks, was "cathartic release," which made American decision-makers more confident in initiating, and the American public more willing to accept, new approaches to the Communist world. That there is something to this I have suggested at several earlier points. But as a basic explanation it overlooks what seems to me, from an un-neutral vantage point, to be quite evident — that Soviet behavior has changed much more radically after (and in part as a result of) the Cuban crisis than has American behavior.

Focusing specifically on the test ban, the Soviets in July agreed to a version of a test ban that they knew the West would agree to and that they had previously rejected (as the Chinese unkindly

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[23] See *Thinking about the Unthinkable* (New York, 1962), pp. 150-155, and *On Escalation*, Chapter XII, "De-escalation and Its Aftermath."

pointed out [24]). Moreover, the Soviets had previously rejected a limited test ban on the grounds, probably valid, that it would tend to freeze the strategic balance in the favor of the United States. Yet this argument was hardly less valid in 1963. One of the most evident changes in Soviet behavior in recent years has been tacit acceptance of a position of relative strategic inferiority *visa vis* the United States, and this acceptance would seem to be one of the fundamental bases of the detente. From the early sputniks to about 1961, Premier Khrushchev made extravagant claims about the impending or actual shift in the strategic balance in his favor. These claims were somewhat muted by 1962. Since the Cuban crisis, the theme has been only that "everyone knows that the Soviet Union has adequate weapons."

No doubt in large measure this shift only coincided with the missile crisis. Khrushchev's earlier boasting very effectively persuaded the United states to try to more than close the supposed "missile gap."[25] Given its enormous economic advantage, the United States could easily close the gap once it was determined to do so. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, could match the United States ICBM for ICBM only by sacrificing other important goals, if at all. Thus by 1962 Khrushchev was probably prepared, if reluctantly, to make do with an inferior position. But in two ways the Cuban crisis must have confirmed him in this course. In the first place, if it had been his intention to right the strategic imbalance quickly and relatively cheaply, by placing substantial strategic capability in Cuba, this alternative was rather dramatically and conclusively closed off. With no cheap way to catch up available, economic constraints led Khrushchev to conclude that he had better set aside his hopes of superiority or even parity. Secondly, restrained American behavior and limited American objectives in the Cuban crisis confirmed, if further confirmation were needed, that the United States would not exploit its strategic advantage to try to shift the status quo in its favor, in the manner that Soviet (and especially Chinese doctrine), provides for in the case of Soviet superiority,[26] and in the manner that the Soviets (even while lacking superiority) had previously attempted, neither especially adroitly nor successfully. (On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, the crisis also showed that the United States would act and take risks to prevent the status quo from being suddenly shifted to its disadvantage.) Thus acceptance of an inferior position was both economically expedient and politically tolerable. (And on the other hand, there might not be compensating political gains if, at great cost, superiority were achieved.)[27]

Acceptance of inferiority is just one mark of changed Soviet behavior. In other ways the Soviet Union appears to be striking a new balance between risk and stability and to be playing the part of a "responsible" great power (most dramatically indicated at the Tashkent Conference). The question still remains, of course, of whether this change is "genuine" or merely "tactical." Have the Soviet leader's really decided that the world as it is, is a tolerable place in which to live, that the real

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[24] Chinese Statements of July 31 and August 15,1963. Griffith, *op. cit.*, pp. 327, 340ff.

[25] Khrushchev's forecast of impending Soviet superiority is a good illustration of the point that prophecies can be self-defeating as well as self-fulfilling.

[26] See Robert D. Crane, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute on War and the Cuban Crisis," *Orbis*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Fall, 1964), especially p. 540.

[27] For a much more detailed discussion of changed Soviet strategic emphasis since the Cuban crisis see, Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1964), especially pp. 48-50.

Soviet opportunity is domestic, and that Soviet foreign policy should be confined to conventional maneuvering for marginal advantage? Or, on the other hand, are they merely making a virtue out of a temporary necessity, biding for time and regrouping their forces before some new revolutionary initiative. No one, I take it, can answer this question now,. but one can make several guesses. First, Soviet leaders probably have not made an explicit choice (and do not now have to) between these alternatives themselves, or perhaps they disagree among themselves; second, any such choice depends in part on the policy of the United States and other nations; third, the practical differences may not be too great (for example, Khrushchev's thesis of the worldwide victory of socialism by force of domestic example tends to bridge this gap).

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The Cuban missile crisis, as a direct confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, presumably had its most direct impact on relations between these two nations. Yet if the international system is indeed a system, we would expect it to have an impact on other relationships as well, in particular Sino-Soviet relations.

Changed Sino-Soviet relations since Cuba may in large measure simply reflect changed Soviet-American relations. For some purposes, one might imagine a scale on which the United States and China stand at opposite extremes and along which the Soviet Union, in terms of its foreign policy, can place itself at any intervening point. The suggestion is that the Soviet Union cannot, under present conditions, improve its relations with China and the United States simultaneously.

However, when we examine the impact of the Cuban crisis on the intricacies of the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute, this relationship becomes more complex. At first blush, the ideological implications of the crisis appear paradoxical. Thus Soviet "defeat" in Cuba seems to be a Soviet ideological victory — the Unites States was shown to be a powerful, determined, and also "sober" adversary, as postulated in the Soviet world view. In fact Premier Khrushchev suggested as much in his December 12 speech justifying Soviet policy.[28] Conversely, a Soviet victory in Cuba (alternative B) seemingly would have confirmed the Chinese position ("the United States is a 'paper tiger'"). However, Sino-Soviet relations involve power as well as ideology and one can guess that a clear-cut Soviet success in Cuba (whatever its doctrinal implications, and especially if followed by progress in Berlin) would have considerably strengthened the Soviet position in the Communist system and at least temporarily would have healed the rift on Soviet terms.

Moreover, this argument does not do justice to the subtleties of the rival ideological positions (especially the Chinese one). The Chinese accused the Soviet Union (and Khrushchev in particular) of "nuclear fetishism" and undue stress on the Soviet-American strategic balance (at the expense, in particular, of national liberation).[29] For this reason, and because the United States deserves "tactical respect," they opposed the Soviet policy of introducing missiles into Cuba as

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[28] "If [imperialism] is now a 'paper tiger,' those who say this know that this 'paper tiger' has atomic teeth.' Pachter, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

[29] Chinese Statements of June 14 and November 18, 1963. Griffith, *op. cit.*, pp. 26lff, 485ff. See also Crane, "The Sino-Soviet Dispute on War," *loc. cit.*

"adventurism." However, once the Soviets embarked on this course (without consulting the Chinese), the Chinese dutifully gave their support. The subsequent Soviet retreat was branded as "humiliating capitulation," and, in the open polemics of the following summer, the Chinese mercilessly ridiculed the entire Soviet operation and the Soviet rationalization of it.[30]

In short, Cuba provided additional fuel for China's verbal assault on the Soviet leadership. More important, however, was Premier Khrushchev's post-Cuba decision to seek detente with the West and, in particular, to sign a nuclear test ban treaty, which evidently triggered the long awaited "open break" between the two parties (and states). Khrushchev may have already decided that his relations with China were past repair in any case, and that he had best exploit whatever opportunities existed for an opening to the West, leaving Chinese relations out of his political calculus. In any case, with the conclusion of the test ban treaty, polemics between the Soviet Union and China reached their highest — and most revealing — point.[31]

Finally and briefly, let us look at the impact of the Cuban crisis on European-American relations. European attitudes toward American foreign policy are governed in large part by two fears (differently weighted by different European governments at different times) — first that the United States will not go to war when Europeans want it to, and second that the United States will go to war when Europeans do not want it to. It is difficult for the United States to reassure all European countries on both points simultaneously.

The American response in Cuba provided ambiguous reassurance on the first point — more ambiguous than American spokesmen like to suggest. The episode "proved" that the United States will run risks to protect its vital interests. If it will not do this, it could hardly be expected to run risks to protect its allies' (somewhat different) interests. But whether it will in fact protect its allies remains to be proved. On the second point, the episode was somewhat scary to Europeans. Cuba is peripheral to European concerns, and Europeans are used to living close under the Soviet gun. (However, Europeans should be at least as concerned as Americans about the vulnerability of the Strategic Air Command.) At the same time the United States acted unilaterally in a situation that presumably involved the risk of general war. Some Europeans subsequently called for a policy off "no annihilation without representation" (or at least consultation). But in this case at least consultation would have increased the risk of annihilation.[32]

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[30] "Anyone with common sense will ask: since the rockets were introduced, why did they have to be withdrawn afterwards? And in as much as the rockets were withdrawn afterwards, why had they to be introduced before? According to you, there was a great deal of finesse in first putting them in and then taking them out . . . . But where is the [United States] guarantee [not to invade Cuba]? Unfortunately, you do not seen to have much confidence in that . . . . The Soviet leaders blame China for not having supported them as an ally should. You had better look up the documents. Was there anything you did right during the Caribbean crisis on which we did not support you? You are dissatisfied, but what exactly did you want us to support?" Chinese Statement of September 1, 1963, Griffith, op. cit., p. 384. The Soviet retreat from Cuba must have reinforced the Chinese in their determination to acquire independent nuclear capability.

[31] Griffith, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 326-387. By the standard of both conventional and Marxist-Leninist logic and sophistication, it is hard to believe that the Chinese did not come out on top in these exchanges. However, the Soviet Union has other advantages.

[32] See Lippmann, "Cuba and the Nuclear Risk," *loc. cit.*, especially pp.57-58.

The Soviet-American detente following the crisis also had its impact on European American relations. To some Europeans, it suggested the possibility of a Soviet-American deal over the heads (and at the expense) of European partners, in which case American protection could no longer be relied upon (and then European nations should provide their own protection). To others, it suggested that the entire post-war structure of Europe was obsolete, that the danger of war in Europe had vanished, in which case American protection was no longer necessary. By either line of reasoning, the Cuban crisis and the subsequent detente accented those pre-existing trends pointing toward the loosening of the Western alliance.

Analysis of a third dimension of the Cuban impact on European-American relations awaits further and more detailed research. If it is true that the Cuban crisis overloaded American decision-making mechanisms with the result that the Skybolt decision was disposed of on narrow technical grounds,[33] this is an enormously important consequence, leading as it did directly to the Nassau Conference and indirectly to increased Gaullist hostility towards things Anglo-Saxon, British exclusion from the Common Market, and the initiation of the Multi-lateral Force.

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To conclude, the Cuban missile crisis not only provides an excellent case study of international calculation and miscalculation, of crisis communications and signaling, but also appears to have been an important and consequential historical event, even if it does not necessarily qualify. as a "turning point." Furthermore, examination of the crisis in the context of the international political system tends to confirm the proposition that crises, through their spillover consequences, provide (together with technological change and internal violence) a source of change in the present system.

[33] See above p. 1. Neustadt, *loc. cit.*, p. 97; Sorenson, *Decision-Making in the White House*, p. 18. See also Henry Brandon, "Skybolt: The Full Story." *The Sunday Times* (London), December 8,1963, pp. 29-31.

APPENDIX I

Signals and Communications

The Cuban crisis provides good example both of signals received and signals missed. During the open crisis, the United States successfully communicated its determination to see the missiles removed and the Soviet Union successfully communicated its willingness to do so, short of outright capitulation. Prior to the week of October 22-28, however, signals were missed.

We can distinguish between purposeful signaling (the purposeful communication of intentions, when one wants to make them clear; this includes both warnings and reassurances) and inadvertent signaling (the inadvertent communication of intentions when one wants to keep them secret). The Soviet Union evidently missed the United States' purposeful signals that strategic weapons in Cuba would not be tolerated. One reason for this was that the American warning was blurred by the domestic political context it which it was made. The burden of President Kennedy's news conference remarks of September 4 and 11 was to restrain and reprimand the domestic opposition; the risk of intervention was stressed; the warning to the international opposition was perfunctory by comparison.[34] This suggests what is likely to be a general problem for a democratic nation — especially the United States — which speaks with many voices for diverse purposes. When it is resolved to respond in a certain contingency, it may be unable to communicate its intent effectively. Thus the contingency is more likely to occur.

With respect to inadvertent signals, one would suppose retrospectively that the Soviet Union might have picked up sufficient signals between October 16 and 22 to move to pre-empt the planned American initiative.[35] But again contradictory signals were emanating from the United States. To use the appropriate jargon, an open (and open-mouthed) society may not be good at damping down inadvertent signals but it excels in at producing noise that can hide them. Apparently the Soviets were taken quite by surprise.

In reconstructing the course of the crisis, one is impressed by the time lag involved when the two principals communicated privately (i. e. not by radio broadcasts). When the crisis looked most grim to American policy-makers (October 27), this may have been due only to delay in receiving a message.[36] One result of the crisis was the establishment of the "hot line," permitting instantaneous private communication. How a hot line would have affected the course of the Cuban crisis is hard to say, but it should be pointed out that it only facilitates communication. It transmits with equal efficiency all sorts of messages, including threats and deceptions.

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[34] Pachter, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-178.

[35] It would be interesting, but difficult, to do a "warning and decision" study from the Soviet point of view. Cf. Roberta Wohlstetter, "Cuba and Pear Harbor: Hindsight and Foresight," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 43, No.4 (July, 1965).

[36] See Pachter, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-69.

APPENDIX II

Cuba and Schelling

Thomas Schelling's brilliant book, *The Strategy of Conflict*, certainly provides one useful basis for a partial analysis and understanding of the Cuban missile crisis. In certain respects the contestants were employing the kind of tactics he discusses, especially in the matter of getting in the first strong (though not irrevocable) commitment. Thus for example the Soviet Union conducted its operation in Cuba secretly and hurriedly (somewhat competitive values; they sacrificed a measure of secrecy for extra speed) in order to present the United States with a *fait accompli*. Once the bases had been completed and revealed to the world, the Soviet Union presumably would have had an even stronger incentive to keep them (at least in the relatively short run) and the United States would have had a harder time in forcing their removal; perhaps it would have been reluctant even to attempt it. Conversely, once the United States discovered the Soviet operation, it wanted to make an effective but also not unnecessarily dangerous commitment to remove the missiles before the bases were completed. This required a well thought out plan, reached relatively quickly but also in secret (not too many people involved in the deliberations; participants typing their own working papers and keeping routine obligations, etc.). Again these values were competitive. Thus there was a race to make the first public commitment, and the United States had the critical advantage of knowing it was in such a race.

The second, dramatic instance of the "first commitment" tactic involved the nuclear warning contained in President Kennedy's speech of October 22.[37] This commitment gave Premier Khrushchev a strong incentive to keep the missiles under Soviet control and, if possible, his personal control, and it made it reckless for him to threaten to do otherwise. Conversely, if Khrushchev had already announced that he had turned control of the missiles over to the Cuban government, and had indicated that it would be difficult or impossible for him to regain control of them even if he wanted to, it would have become reckless or pointless for Kennedy to make the threat that he did.

However, I believe that the Cuban crisis suggests that other factors — including other types of strategic moves — that Schelling does not emphasize can also be of critical importance. Specifically, in a crisis. it is important not only to be able effectively to threaten your opponent but also to be able effectively to reassure your opponent.

In the first place, the success of American policy probably depended to a considerable extent on the ability of the United States to assure the Soviet Union as to the limited nature of its objectives.[38] The Soviet Union would have been less ready to retreat if it had not been persuaded that the United States would not press its initiative further and would not make further demands — in particular that the United States would not seek total Soviet withdrawal from Cuba, the elimination of the Castro government (which must have looked tempting to some people in

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[37] "It shall be the policy of the nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the western hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union." Pachter, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

[38] See Harlan Cleveland, "Crisis Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 41, No.4 (July, 1963), especially p. 246.

Washington), or the unnecessary humiliation of the Soviet Union or of Premier Khrushchev. The Soviet accommodation was also facilitated by American willingness to go along with Khrushchev's "no invasion – no need for missiles" rationale.

Secondly, the importance of reassurance is illustrated by the changing tone of the messages Premier Khrushchev apparently sent to President Kennedy (not all of which have been published). During the earlier part of the week, he was apparently saying something like this: "Watch out. We may not be able to keep things under control. Therefore, you had better be careful." This is a Schellingesque type of warning. But later in the week he was saying: "Don't worry. We have everything under control. Therefore, you can afford to be careful."

Generally, the strategic moves that Schelling finds interesting are the ones that are "interesting" from a theoretical point of view, in particular threats made credible by more or less irrevocable commitments. And indeed there is something fascinating about the idea that it may be wise (or strategic — we might want to make the distinction) to reduce one's own discretion in a conflict situation. You may want to use such tactics in, for example, an experimental game situation. They may work. On the other hand, they may not. Your opponent may not even notice or understand the ingenious way in which you have committed yourself — in which case you can run through the game again. In international politics in the nuclear age, however, one cannot conduct foreign policy in this experimental frame of mind. It is too risky; the scope, if not the probability, of potential disaster is too great.

In summary, the types of strategic moves to which Schelling gives most attention are not (necessarily) those that are most commonly employed in international politics, even — perhaps especially — in crises. Moreover, international poli!tical bargaining cannot be understood entirely in terms of strategic moves of any sort, because of the complex and ambiguous environment, the differing perceptions and perspectives, the differing restraints, resources, and alliances, the differing and imperfect decision-making processes, and all the other factors which combined make the conduct of foreign policy different from disciplining children or playing games on matrices. Thus Schelling is useful and perhaps necessary for a thoughtful analysis of the Cuban Crisis, but he is not sufficient. For example, the Cuban crisis does not demonstrate that "weakness is strength." It demonstrates, if anything, the more obvious proposition.

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